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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001843

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SUBJECT: MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVE GBEMI SARAHI, KWARA STATE

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR HOWARD JETER FOR REASON 1.5 (B) AND (D)

1. (C) Gbemisola "Gbemi" Saraki Forowa, a member of the House of Representatives from Kwara state, was born into Nigeria's political elite. Her political muscle comes from being the daughter of Olusola Saraki, the godfather of Kwara State politics and an important cog in the APP. As with most successful women in Nigeria, her father, a former Presidential candidate, facilitated her political career. Over lunch Gbemi, an opinionated and often colorful speaker, provided her thoughts on the state of Nigerian politics. Although contending that politics is a "man's game," Gbemi claimed to play the game as hard as her male counterparts. End Summary.

Women in Politics:

2. (C) Though clearly relishing the game, Gbemi said she would discourage her own daughter from adhering to her footsteps. It is impossible for a woman to successfully manage a career in politics and a family, she said, citing meetings routinely held between 11pm and 4 am as evidence of deliberate attempts to discourage women. Gbemi explained that the barriers women face range from major hurdles to the petty biases. For example, women in the National Assembly are expected to wear traditional head wraps. Gbemi recalled being scorned on the floor of the Assembly for not dressing according to tradition; she said she will never make that mistake again.

For the Love of Na'abba

3. (C) Further, she said that women in politics often find themselves the victims of rumors about adultery. Gbemi, who is divorced, has faced accusations of a tryst with her mentor, House Speaker Ghali Na'abba. She was candid about Na'abba's financial improprieties, but stated that the attempt to impeach Na'abba in May was engineered by the Presidency and Obasanjo supporters in the House. They wanted to remove Na'abba because of his public opposition to Obasanjo on key matters ranging from the electoral law to the federal budget. While acknowledging the Speaker has dipped his hand into the jar, she defended him, stating that Speaker was behaving in time-honored tradition. It is customary in Nigeria to use public funds to develop one's political network. Gbemi said, the voters expect politicians to come with money and bags of rice for votes. However, because of Na'abba's riff with the President, he does not receive any government contracts which he could parlay into funds for his political war chest. Instead, he must make his own way by using House funds and his position as Speaker to get favorable loans. She concluded her thoughts on the Speaker by stating adamantly that although claims of Na'abba's misappropriation are without a doubt true, he will not be removed because of his popularity with most House members.

Thoughts on Obasanjo

4. (C) Clearly a die-hard APP partisan, Gbemi painted a picture of Obasanjo as vindictive, temperamental leader. She told a story of one of Obasanjo's personal assistants whose honesty angered the President. Driving past the new 30 billion Naira stadium under construction on the way from the airport, Obasanjo voiced exasperation about people who criticized the cost and utility. The assistant tried to explain that people were not necessarily adverse to the stadium but some felt there were more pressing social problems to which the funds could have been directed. Fuming, Obasanjo told the driver to stop the car and

ordered his assistant to make the rest of the journey by foot. (Comment: This is one several such stories in circulation. Many of the tales are likely apocryphal. However, they have currency because they fit popular perceptions of Obasanjo's character. Whether real or make-believe, the tales reinforce negative opinions of the President, steadily damaging his image.)

15. (C) Gbemi said Obasanjo's autocratic behavior has caused him to lose support in his own PDP party. The President views himself as "the Messiah", she opined. Gbemi said that she is close to the National Security Advisor, Aliyu Mohammed, who she believed could resign from his current position because he has been marginalized by the Presidency. Mohammed may emerge as the candidate to represent the North, she felt.

16. (C) On the other hand, the Vice President, Gbemi said, has betrayed his fellow Northerners. Gbemi continued, Obasanjo is using the Vice President to his own detriment and in fact may be putting Atiku's life on the line. (Comment: Gbemi did not elaborate further but she was clearly implying the Vice President was liable to have other untoward experiences such as the stone throwing incident in Kano.)

17. (C) Despite the internecine feuding within the party, Gbemi revealed that she is considering a switch to the PDP. Although questioned, she made almost no mention of her father's plans or rumors that he is also thinking joining the PDP. Her desire to change allegiance probably are due to frustration with her father's diminished influence within the APP party and the recently announced change of the APP party to the ANPP. Gbemi's closeness to Na'abba may also be a factor.

18. (C) Comment: Gbemi Saraki's comments were illuminating and show the extra burden that female politicians carry. While her statements that Na'abba's malfeasance was not extraordinary may be true, her nonchalance about his transgressions was troubling. Confirming what Gbemi stated about the rift between NSA Mohammed and the president, other sources have also indicated that Mohammed may break camp; yet we doubt if he will try to hoist his own presidential banner. Most likely, neither will someone closer to Gbemi, her father. Like father, like daughter: recent newspapers report that he too will abandon the APP for the PDP, increasing the anti-Obasanjo quotient within the party by two.

ANDREWS